

Party Groups in the European Parliament, Cohesiveness and MEPs' Survey Data: New Evidence on Voting Behaviour from a New (Simple) Methodology?

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Abstract

The increased centrality of the European Parliament within the EU's institutional structure has influenced the importance of voting behaviour within the Parliament. The concept of voting behaviour can be split into a variety of elements, one of which is parliamentary group cohesiveness. A consolidated stream of literature has treated the Euro-party groups as highly cohesive actors, influenced mainly by the classical left-right cleavage, with nationality playing a marginal role. However, other scholars suggest that the methods used to reach these findings are biased. Using an original and simple methodology, which transforms data from surveys to virtual votes, I build a simple model to test voting cohesiveness if the national element is a weak predictor of "vote"; even though this vote is dependent upon exogenous preferences and not mediated by party discipline. My results show that the oft-repeated claims about the single-dimensionality of the European Parliament should be taken more carefully: national affiliation seems to play a greater role than the one usually envisaged by the mainstream literature.

Introduction and research question

In its sixty-year history the European Parliament (EP) has evolved from a mere consultative body into "one of the most powerful interstate assemblies in the Western world" (Hix et al. 2006: 494). This increase of power makes it increasingly important to know how Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) vote. Contemporary studies on the EP can be classified into four interrelated areas from a broad viewpoint, according to the taxonomy of contributions by Hix et al. (2003: 193):

1. general development and functioning of the EP, focusing especially on the institutional change provided by the entry into force of the new Treaties
2. political behaviour of the citizens/voters and EP elections;
3. the internal politics and organization of the EP;
4. inter-institutional bargaining between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission.

Focusing on the question of cohesiveness¹ of the European Party Groups (EPGs) and the level of reliability of the mainstream measures of it in the light of a possible selection bias, this article falls under the third category. Thus, this article studies whether we reach insightful results on the internal dynamics of the EP by using MEPs' survey data to compare exogenous preferences to revealed legislative behaviour. In particular, does national affiliation play a greater role than the one usually envisaged by part of the literature? To answer this question, the article analyses the most common measures of cohesion and presenting empirical results proceeds to the proposed methodology used to convert surveys into votes.

¹ Although a slight theoretical distinction between cohesion and cohesiveness could be legitimately provided ("cohesion" refers to the characteristic per se of an actor of being cohesive, while "cohesiveness" implies that this actor is able to exert a force on its internal component, in order to act as an integrated and unitary system), here the two terms will be used as synonyms.

Twenty years of studies on MEPs' voting behaviour

The interest for the general question "how do MEPs vote?" attracted increasing academic attention since the early 1980s, in the aftermath of the first direct elections in 1979. In the 1990s the first quantitative and rigorous studies of voting behaviour in the EP were published (Attinà 1990; Raunio 1996). These studies were based on the only voting records available in the EP, namely the roll-call votes (RCVs). These were the votes which were officially recorded, in the form of minutes drafted by the Parliament's offices. The records track how each MEP voted or abstained. Commonly, this voting procedure is called "public vote", because a member of a parliament has no means of keeping the vote secret. In the American, British and in few other parliaments all the votes are roll-calls. However, in many other cases such as Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, Argentina, and Brazil some votes are public and recorded, while others are secret (Hug 2006: 24-33). In the European Parliament the choice of the voting procedure is defined by articles 166 and 167 of the EP Rules of Procedure. Only certain votes are required to be taken by roll-call. However, a political group or at least 32 MEPs can request any vote to be taken by roll-call. In addition to RCVs, two other voting procedures are possible: the "raise of hands" and "voice" vote where it is recorded only if the bill passes or not, and another type of electronic vote that records the aggregate number of yea/nay, but no information about the single vote. The main findings of the first studies were two: EPGs show high cohesion and in the light of the RCV-based results the classical domestic political cleavages exist also in the EP.

In response to these studies, Carrubba and Gabel (1999) draw attention on the potential selection bias in using RCVs to study MEPs' voting behaviour. On the one hand, it is impossible to empirically analyse the votes falling under the other voting procedures, because there are no records of those votes. However, RCVs are a small subset of the whole universe of votes cast (roughly $\frac{1}{3}$). Thus, only if RCVs represent a random sample of the whole universe of votes cast, then the causal inferences based on RCVs can be generalized as a reflection of MEPs' voting behaviour. If a dependent variable of a research (e.g. intra-party cohesion, inter-party competition) is related² to the rationale behind the RCV request, endogeneity problems are expected to emerge.

² Either positively, negatively or both - but in a way such as the two effects do not cancel out each other.

In the light of this it may be assumed that RCVs are requested by EPGs for strategic reasons.

In the light of the limitations of the RCV-based approaches, the literature splits into two very different streams, which proceed on parallel tracks, except for rare cases. On the one hand, we observe a straightforward continuation of the study of MEPs' voting behaviour through RCVs. Hix (2001) was the first to apply Poole and Rosenthal's method of creating spatial maps to the EP context. He did it first only for the 1999-2004 Parliament, then together with Noury and Roland for all the legislatures since 1979—after processing all the RCVs held in the EP. The creation of a systematic dataset seems functional to the spatial representation of the legislative dynamics of the EP. Many other papers have been published on the topic, all of them agreeing on some main findings. First, EPGs show high intra-party cohesion and inter-party competition. Second, voting patterns fall mainly along the traditional left-right cleavage, and only partially along an orthogonal pro/anti-European continuum. Third, national affiliation is a weak predictor of vote; and consequently, the EP works surprisingly like most of domestic parliaments in Western democracies (Kreppel 2002; Hix et al. 2005, 2006, 2007; Hix and Noury 2009). The arguments advanced in order to justify the fact that their analysis is based on a subset of votes cast within the EP, are the following: RCVs and votes falling under a different voting procedure do not vary in terms of importance; both are cast on the same policy issues; so, no issue is voted too often with a certain type of vote; and finally, all the EPGs are equally likely to request RCVs, so no group requests them disproportionately more than the others.

On the other hand, an increasing number of critical scholars (Carrubba et al. 2003, 2004, 2008, 2009; Thiem 2006; Hug 2006, 2009) claim to have concrete evidence to confute those assumptions. First of all, according to them the majority of non-RCVs are cast on legislative voting (the most important votes), while most of the RCVs are cast on resolution and consultation votes (less important). Second, RCVs are cast disproportionately on specific issues. Finally, some EPG requests them more often than other groups. Consequently, inferences based on RCVs only, may be misleading and it seems necessary to look somewhere else to fully understand the dynamics of voting behaviour within the EP. Later, these authors rephrased their criticisms in clearer terms, pointing out not only the problems of endogeneity in party cohesion, but also the possibly misleading way scholars pooled data together to create the dataset

(Carrubba et al. 2003: 6-9). They no longer studied voting behaviour directly, but focused on the reasons why RCVs are requested. Some scholars have tried to provide an explanation to the real reasons behind a RCV request, relying mostly on theory, while others have applied methods based on game-theory to model this kind of situation. Thiem (2006: 17) considers the RCV requests a consequence of high party cohesion. On the other hand, Carrubba et al. (2008: 570-572) see these requests as signalling strategies either for a group to highlight their pre-existing unity or another group's co-ordination failure. In other words, cohesion – or lack of it – increases the likelihood of a RCV request.

These two sides of the academic “battlefield”, however, are not completely detached from each other. First, the critics seem to increasingly talk to the other side, to point out their flaws. On the other hand, also the studies based on RCVs talk to the other side as they do not completely ignore that there is a substantial number of challenging arguments undermining the validity of their inferences. In most cases, the authors simply recognize the accomplishments of their critics, but then they present opposite arguments to justify their methodological choice. Often some quick references to the major literature on the selection bias are mentioned. Second, some joint works have been developed by scholars usually supporting opposite viewpoints: for instance, Gabel et al. (2008: 19-20) built a visual representation of the “behaviour space” of MEPs using both RCV and survey data. Preferences revealed through voting behaviour are shown in the x-axis of the graphic outcome, while preferences revealed through surveys are shown in the y-axis, showing that “parties play a role in shaping MEP behaviour”, but at the same time “MEP policy preferences exert a systematic effect on MEP legislative behaviour even after controlling for party influences”.

Theoretical framework of party group cohesion in the EP

Why do we observe party cohesion in legislatures? From a very broad perspective, organizational strength and voting cohesion of legislative parties are explained by two types of institutions: external ones (the structure of relations between the parliament and the executive) and internal ones (the structure of incentives inside the legislature). The literature usually differentiates between parliamentary systems and presidential systems. In the former, legislative parties are usually more cohesive, be-

cause the executive is “fused” to a parliamentary majority, and governments can reward loyal backbenchers with ministerial seats. In addition, as Diermeier and Feddersen (1998: 611-621) point out, governing parties can call a vote-of-confidence motion, which confronts their parliamentarians with the risk of not being re-elected if the parliament is dissolved. In the presidential systems, by contrast, parties in government are less able to enforce a strong party discipline amongst their supporters in the parliament: “loyalty to the party line is less important, since lack of discipline does not threaten survival of the executive” (Hix et al. 2005: 212).

From the mere perspective of institutional functioning, the EU can be classified as a separated-powers system, where the Executive (the European Commission) does not require the direct support of a majority in the EP to govern. Moreover, the Commission cannot introduce a vote-of-confidence motion in the EP or dissolve it, calling for new parliamentary elections. Despite this institutional structure, it is still reasonable to expect that the structure of incentives inside the legislature can lead to powerful legislative party organization: legislators who expect to have similar voting preferences on a range of future policy issues can reduce the transaction costs of coalition-formation by establishing a party organization on the basis of a division-of-labour agreement³. On the other hand, the benefits associated to group membership also entail costs. In some cases, a party takes decisions that may be unpopular with specific constituencies, or ideologically distant from a legislator's preference space. In these situations, he/she may either vote against the party, to show his/her disappointment but with the associated risk of a political defeat, or may adhere to the official line and vote cohesively with the party group (Hix et al. 2005: 213-214). In other words, the exogenous preferences of each MEP appear shaped by both strategic and institutional factors (primarily, party discipline) as they define legislators' voting behaviour (see Figure 1).

As theoretically defined above, cohesiveness is not the only relevant element of the EP party system, although it is the only one directly related to MEPs' voting behaviour. To provide a comprehensive picture of the EPGs' dynamics it is worth looking at the EP's inclusiveness and systemness (Bardi 2011).

Since the very beginning party groups in the EP have been highly inclusive. In 1979 the three main EPGs were

³ Party members provide labour and capital – such as information gathering and policy expertise – while leaders distribute committee and party offices.

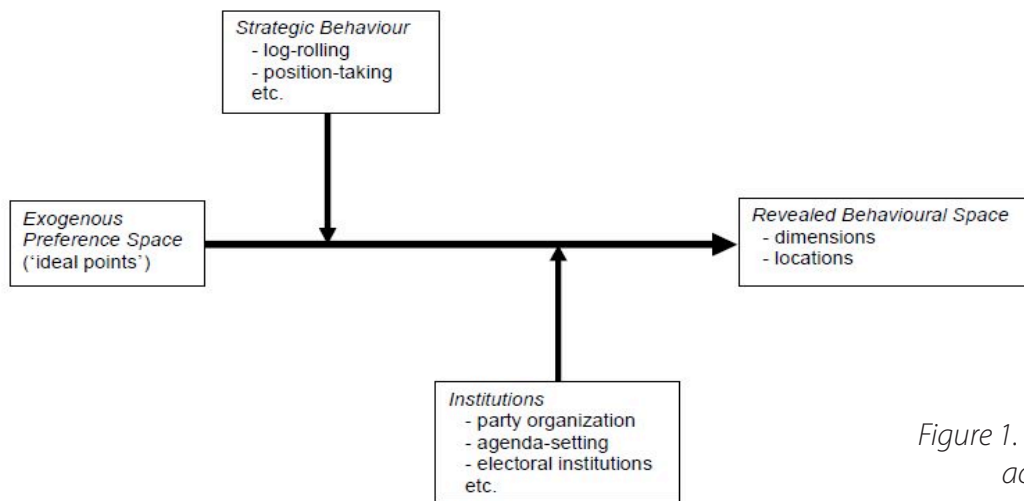


Figure 1. MEPs' preference and behaviour, according to Gabel and Hix (2007).

composed of deputies marked by a fairly differentiated national background: the People's Party group included MEPs from seven member states; the Socialists from all and the Liberals from eight member states. This trend has remained consistent, despite the subsequent enlargements of the EU. Neither the last "injection" of heterogeneity due to the Eastern enlargement in 2004 and 2007 has substantially reduced EP inclusiveness. This proves the absorption potential of the EPGs in relation to the European dynamics.

Second, also systemness has remained high: the current number of EPGs equals the number of EPGs in the parliament of 1979. The growing heterogeneity of political families inside the EP seems to have been overshadowed by a highly systemic environment⁴.

Measures of cohesion in the EP

A variety of indices of party cohesion are used in the EP literature. The "Index of voting likeness" (Rice 1925) represents one of the first attempts. It consists of the absolute difference between yes and no votes of the members of a party, divided by the sum of yes and no votes. The main asset of this index is represented by its simplicity, however, it presents the major shortcoming of not including abstentions in the calculation⁵. Attinà

(1990) proposed a slight modification of this index, including abstention. However, Attinà's index can result in a negative number, making it harder to use it for descriptive analysis and statistical purposes. Hix et al. (2005) introduced an "Agreement Index" (AI). It is calculated as follows:

$$AI_i = \frac{\max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\} - \frac{1}{2}[(Y_i + N_i + A_i) - \max\{Y_i, N_i, A_i\}]}{(Y_i + N_i + A_i)}$$

where Y_i denotes the number of Yes votes expressed by group i on a given vote, N_i the number of No votes and A_i the number of Abstain votes. As a result, the AI equals 1 when all the members of a party vote together and equals 0 when the members of a party are equally divided between all three of the voting options (vote in favour, vote against, and abstain).

The scores of the AI give us a first impression of how cohesive the groups in the EP are. For the first four Parliaments (1979-1999), the cohesion scores are taken directly from Hix et al. (2005: 218). For the fifth and sixth legislature (1999-2009), the data are taken from Bardi (2011). With respect to the current legislature, the cohesion scores are taken from the project www.votewatch.eu⁶, chaired by Hix et al. and Priestley. Here, the cohesion scores are calculated using the RCVs held from July 2009 to January 2011. The results are straightforward. The EPGs show very high cohesiveness starting from first EP legislatures. Looking at the current EP, many EPGs show very high cohesiveness (four groups' AI score 0.9 or higher: S&D, European People's Party, Liberals and Nordic Green would give the result 1, which is the highest level of cohesion possible.

⁶ This website is a public database of all recorded votes in the EP and contains useful information such as European election results, coalition trends, session attendance and group cohesiveness.

⁴ On the other hand, following the increase of EU membership, the number of EPGs formed by only one national party has fallen dramatically and completely disappeared as the creation of one-nation groups has been explicitly forbidden. A specific EP Rule of Procedure (Rule 30, "formation of political groups") states that a political group shall consist of deputies from a specific number of member states. Following the 2004 and 2009 enlargements, the threshold is set to one-fourth of the member states.

⁵ Paradoxically then, in a party group where half of the deputies abstain and the other half votes yes (or no), this index

Left), and all the groups show high cohesiveness (over 0.8), with the only exception of the non-attached members and of the Eurosceptic group of Europe of Freedom and Democracy (EFD). From a diachronic

perspective (1979-2009), all the groups increased their cohesiveness, with the exception of the Eurosceptics, falling from 0.83 in 1989 to 0.49 in 2009. The AI scores are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. EPGs' cohesiveness in RCVs, 1979-2009

Source: Hix et al. (2005), Bardi (2011), www.votewatch.eu. Party group labels: PES: Party of European Socialists (SOC, PES), then Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D, after 2009 elections to include the Italian PD, Partito Democratico). EPP: European People's party - Christian Democrats & Conservatives (EPP, ED) and Italian Conservatives (FE), then EPP alone (after 2009 elections). ELDR: European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party (ELD, ELDR groups), then Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE, after 2004 elections). LEFT: Radical Left (COM, LU, EUL/NGL) and Italian Communists & allies (EUL). GAUL: Gaullists & allies (EPD, EDA, UFE, UEN), then European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR, after 2009 elections). GRN: Greens & allies (RBW(84), G, G/EFA). CON: British Conservatives & allies (ED). RIGHT: Extreme Right (ER). ANTI: Anti-Europeans (EN, I-EN, EDD, IND/DEM after 2004 elections, then EFD after 2009 elections). REG: Regionalists & allies (RBW(89), ERA). IND: Independents (TCDI, TGI; group dismantled in October 2001). NA: Non-attached members.

	EP1 (79-84)	EP2 (84-89)	EP3 (89-94)	EP4 (94-99)	EP5 (99-04)	EP6 (04-09)	EP7 (09-14)
PES	0,76	0,87	0,9	0,9	0,9	0,91	0,94
EPP	0,9	0,93	0,91	0,9	0,87	0,88	0,93
ELDR	0,85	0,85	0,85	0,86	0,88	0,89	0,9
LEFT	0,81	0,87	0,86	0,8	0,8	0,85	0,84
GAUL	0,8	0,84	0,85	0,79	0,75	0,76	0,87
GRN	-	0,81	0,85	0,91	0,92	0,91	0,96
CON	0,89	0,92	0,89	-	-	-	-
RIGHT	-	0,93	0,88	-	-	-	-
ANTI	-	-	0,83	0,67	0,5	0,47	0,49
REG	-	-	0,87	0,91	-	-	-
IND	0,78	-	-	-	0,64	-	-
NA	0,74	0,79	0,81	0,63	0,44	0,44	0,42
Average	0,82	0,87	0,86	0,82	0,74	0,76	0,79
Average (-NA)	0,83	0,88	0,87	0,84	0,78	0,81	0,85

The three main EP groups – Socialists, Christian Democrats/People's Party, and Liberals – present a relatively high level of cohesiveness starting from the first direct election (respectively 0.76, 0.90, 0.58). Since the first election the trend has positively increased. Today, the three main EPGs score respectively 0.94, 0.93 and 0.90. If we look at the results of EP as a whole, the average cohesiveness score per group seems to have slightly decreased, from 0.82 in 1979 to 0.79 in 2011. However, the result is heavily influenced by the declining cohesiveness of the group of non-attached members. In the past, the threshold to form a group was lower, so the non-attached group was smaller and more "homogeneous". In the current and past decade, the non-attached group has become bigger and

politically more heterogeneous, even though it remained numerically dominated by far-right wing members. Thus, it is reasonable to expect its cohesiveness to decrease. Exclusion of the non-attached MEPs from the calculation (last row of table 1), shows how the average cohesion has slightly increased during the years (from 0.83 in 1979 to 0.85 in 2011). In the light of these results, one may conclude that the EP has been increasingly marked by high cohesiveness of its constituent units. However, the advice of Carrubba et al (2009) prompts a question of whether the inferences based on RCVs are unbiased and generalizable: do they accurately represent MEPs' voting behaviour, in terms of cohesiveness? To answer this question, survey-based MEPs' preferences are analysed.

A new (simple) methodology: from surveys to “virtual” votes.

Surveys are a useful tool to explore the preferences of the members of elected assemblies. To date, each directly elected EP convocation has been surveyed by scholars; the first four by different research groups⁷, while the remaining three (V, VI, VII) were investigated by the European Parliament Research Group (EPRG), led by Farrell et al.. The survey includes personal questions, questions about the attitudes towards representation and general political attitudes, and on further EU institutional reform. The basic structure of the survey remained mainly unchanged during the year, even though some questions were added and some methodological refinements were implemented. The percentage of respondents has increased overtime: in 2000 only 192 MEPs participated to the survey, while in 2010 the number of participating MEPs equalled 272 (Hix et al. 2011). The model presented in this paper is simple. First, I have developed an original dataset of virtual votes based on survey data—i.e. expressed preferences—and compared the results with real votes (RCVs) in the same time span. The rationale behind this model comes from Bardi (2011) and from Hix et al (2008). However, while the latter used survey data to build a visual representation of MEPs' preferences, the original idea of this study is to transform survey answers into virtual votes and use the same agreement index to compare RCVs and virtual votes.

a. The data. To conduct the test, I have used the data from the 2010 MEPs' survey. I have focused on question 6.4, as it captures MEPs' attitudes towards different issues. These issues cover economic matters, social welfare, crime, and women's rights. The question is presented as follows: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?”, then the following eight statements are proposed:

1. Greater effort should be made to reduce inequality of income.
2. Tougher action should be taken against criminals.
3. Government should play a greater role in managing the economy.
4. Current welfare spending should be maintained, even if it means raising taxes.
5. The use of marijuana should be decriminalised.
6. It is more important to reduce inflation than to reduce unemployment.
7. There should be fewer restrictions on immigration.
8. Women should be free to decide for themselves on abortion.

For each statement, the respondent is asked to give a grade, using the classical 5-point-scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). I have transformed the answers to this question into “virtual” votes, as if there have been a bill proposing the content of the statement, for which each MEP can vote yes, no or abstain according to his preferences. To create this fictional dataset of votes I have used the following rule: if a MEP agrees with the statement (either strongly or not), I have input a Yes vote; if neither agrees nor disagrees, I have input an Abstention vote; if disagrees or strongly disagrees, I have input a No vote. However, as none of the statements of question 6.4 covers issues of European Integration, I have included another question from the survey. The question added to my dataset is question 6.5: “Where would you place yourself on the question of the European Integration?” In this case, the answer option was operationalized as an 11-point-scale, which ranges from 0 (European Integration has gone too far) to 10 (the EU should become a federal state immediately). The scale is recoded as follows: values from 0 to 4—No votes (towards further European Integration); value 5—an abstention; and, values from 6 to 10—Yes votes. For each participating MEP I have created nine virtual votes, one for each issue. Virtually it represents a dataset of 272 MEPs voting nine times on different issues, resulting in 2448 “virtual votes”.

Before proceeding, a further methodological clarification is needed. Since one of the main problems of looking solely at RCVs is the fact that this sample is non-representative, and one may argue that the proposed method does not produce substantial quantitative improvements over the selection bias problem. This may be true, however, with a crucial qualitative difference. If on the one hand, the problem of RCVs is that there is a correlation between the type of vote and party cohesiveness, on the other hand this does not hold when it comes to survey data. In other words, one can expect MEPs to shift from their ideal vote in order to comply with party line; but there is no such correlation when a MEP is expressing his/her opinion in an anonymous survey. The original dataset is incomplete, but it does not suffer from endogeneity problems.

b. The results. I have applied the Agreement Index to the new “virtual votes” and compared it to the results available in the literature. In particular, I have conducted two kinds

⁷ The 1979-84 Parliament was investigated with a survey prepared by Reif and Wildenman (Bardi, 1989; Westlake, 1994). In the 1984-89 parliament there was a survey conducted by Hrbek and Schweitzer (1989). In the 1989-94, the survey was organised by Bowler and Farrell (1993). In the 1994-99 parliament, Wessels led the research group on the MEPs, while doing a parallel study on members of national parliaments in 11 EU member states (Katz and Wessels, 1999; Schmitt and Thomassen 1999).

of comparisons: 1. Survey-based EPG cohesion compared to survey-based cohesion by national affiliation; 2. RCV-based EPG cohesion compared to survey-based EPG cohesion. First, I have calculated the degree of cohesion by European Party group and national affiliation. If, as Gabel and Hix (2007) state, the ideological dimension of the EP is more relevant than the national affiliation of MEPs, I should expect this index to be higher for the grouping by EPG than by nationality. It is worth stressing that preferences are under discussion, while the aforementioned scholars refer to RCV. However, the same authors also claim that the EP is a politically homogeneous environment. In this respect, if preferences by EPG are compared to preferences by nationality, former should be expected to play a more important role.

Second, I have looked at the degree of absolute cohesion by groups, for both RCVs survey-based data, which present more complex picture. It would not be reasonable to expect cohesion "by preference" to match exactly cohesion "by RCVs", given the direct impact of other factors. Worth noting is also that the results from the original dataset must not necessarily match the results in non-RCVs. In other words, these results do not have the ambition to represent a perfect proxy of the universe of all the votes held in the EP. Yet, according to the mainstream literature, EPGs are considered politically homogeneous groups (Hix 2002), thus, this homogeneity is expected to be primarily a consequence of common preferences, while strengthened by party discipline. However, the results shown in Table 2 and Figure 2 seem to tell a different story.

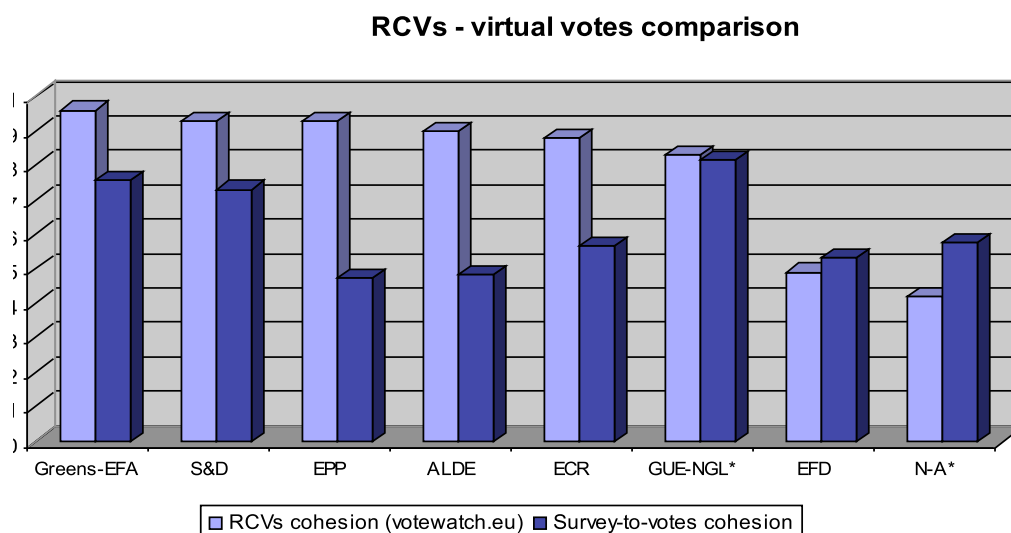
*Table 2. Cohesion scores (AI) for the nine EPGs for each question converted into votes.
The asterisk marks those groups with few observations (<10).*

Source: author's own compilation

	Inequal.	Crime	Econ.	Welfare	Marijua.	Inflation	Immigr.	Abortion	Pro-EU	Average
ALDE	0,46	0,79	0,25	0,25	0,41	0,11	0,25	0,90	0,94	0,48
ECR	0,33	0,92	0,33	0,63	0,80	0,33	0,80	0,33	0,63	0,57
EFD	0,25	1,00	0,25	0,25	0,67	0,50	0,94	0,25	0,67	0,53
EPP-ED	0,47	0,84	0,10	0,16	0,84	0,37	0,37	0,32	0,79	0,47
Greens-EFA	0,96	0,33	0,72	0,86	0,63	0,72	0,80	0,92	0,86	0,76
GUE-NGL*	1,00	0,50	1,00	1,00	0,83	1,00	0,50	1,00	0,50	0,81
N-A*	0,25	0,67	0,25	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,57
PES (S&D)	0,94	0,54	0,77	0,88	0,36	0,83	0,46	0,93	0,86	0,73

Figure 2. Visual representation of the comparison between cohesion scores (AI) of RCVs and the average cohesion of virtual votes obtained through the transformation of survey data (2010 MEPs' survey)

Source: author's own compilation



The EPGs would appear much less cohesive, if their members were to vote according to the preference revealed in the survey. The only outliers appear to be the non-attached MEPs and the group Europe of Freedom and Democracy. In particular, the analysis of the three main groups reveals that the scores of the Socialists differ the least. This may be a con-

sequence of Socialists' higher ideological homogeneity. Thus, Socialist MEPs may be expected to display more similar individual preferences if compared to the other two main groups. In the cases of the European People's Party and the Liberals the difference is striking: 0.47 rather than 0.93 and 0.48 rather than 0.90 respectively, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Comparison between cohesion scores (AI) of RCVs and the average cohesion of virtual votes obtained through the transformation of survey data (2010 MEPs' survey). EPGs that show the highest discrepancy highlighted in bold. The asterisk marks those groups with few observations (<10). Source: author's own compilation.

	Inequal.	Crime	Econ.	Welfare	Marijua.	Inflation	Immigr.	Abortion	Pro-EU	Average
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EPP-ED	0,47	0,84	0,10	0,16	0,84	0,37	0,37	0,32	0,79	0,47
Greens-EFA	0,96	0,33	0,72	0,86	0,63	0,72	0,80	0,92	0,86	0,76
GUE-NGL*	1,00	0,50	1,00	1,00	0,83	1,00	0,50	1,00	0,50	0,81
N-A*	0,25	0,67	0,25	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,67	0,57
PES (S&D)	0,94	0,54	0,77	0,88	0,36	0,83	0,46	0,93	0,86	0,73

Disaggregating the average scores for each question of the survey, shows on which issue the groups appear less internally coherent. Considering the questions: "how much the State should regulate the economy", and if "welfare spending should be maintained even if by means of raising taxes" shows that the EPP's values denote very high internal division: 0.10 and 0.16. Low cohesiveness can be found also regarding abortion, inflation and immigration. The Liberals, on the other hand, are mostly divided on inflation (0.11) and state regulation of the economy, welfare spending, and inflation (both scoring 0.25). However, they look highly cohesive on abortion. The Socialists show low cohesiveness only on the question on marijuana and decriminalization (0.36). All these elements contribute to define a different picture from the one provided by the mainstream literature on the dimension of EP politics (Hix 2002; Hix et al 2003; Hix et al 2005; 2006; 2007). Unlike the mainstream literature, my findings suggest that despite being part of the same parliamentary group, MEPs from different member states show different attitudes towards these issues (as defined by their preferences). If they were to vote according to these preferences they would be members of a strongly divided group. One may expect that the cohesion index calculated by national affiliation to be on average lower than the one calculated by EPG, given the lack of a national "whip". However, the data presented in Table 4 show some noticeable results.

On average, cohesiveness by member state is not as

low as expected. Comparison of these results with the ones in the previous table shows that the majority of the states have shown higher cohesiveness than the majority of EPGs. In absolute terms, cohesiveness by national affiliation ranges from 0.43 (Poland) and 0.47 (Germany) to 0.83 (Portugal), the most cohesive country in the sample⁸. Belgium, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Romania, and Spain score higher than 0.70. On the other hand, only the Socialists, the Greens/European Free Alliance and the United European Left/Nordic Green Left show a level of cohesiveness higher than 0.70. All the countries show higher scores than the People's Party, Liberals, ECR and EFD, with the only exceptions of Germany and Poland. In the light of these results, we can claim that if they were to vote according to their preferences, MEPs would vote more cohesively based on nationality than on ideological terms.

These results seem to define a picture that is pretty distant from the mainstream claim that "the European Parliament is surprisingly like all other democratic parliaments", where votes fall along the left-right political cleavage, and "national affiliation is a weak predictor of how MEPs vote" (Hix, Noury and Roland, 2006, p. 509).

⁸ In Portugal (one asterisk in the table) only few MEPs participated to the survey, and one may think that this cohesiveness is a random product of too few observations. But many other countries, with a higher number of observations, show high cohesiveness too.

More closer consideration shows that many northern European countries, with consolidated tradition of human rights protection (Sweden, Denmark, Belgium) score 1 when it comes to the question on abortion. This means that all the MEPs from these countries “vote” united. On the contrary, in Poland, where abortion is one of the most controversial political issues, MEPs appear divided. The same holds true when it comes to the Italian delegation, scoring 0.30. Interestingly, Belgian MEPs express similar preferences (AI=1) on the question of European Integration, while

the most divided countries on this issue are traditionally Eurosceptic Sweden, Finland and especially the UK.

Conclusions and perspectives on further research.

The EP has evolved from a “multi-lingual talking shop” (Farrell, Hix, Johnson and Scully, 2006, p. 3) to one of the most powerful interstate assemblies in the world. In this respect, it becomes crucial to, understand how

Table 4. Cohesiveness scores (AI) by member State. The asterisk marks those states for which there are few observations (<10): the double asterisk those with too few observations (<5), so they were treated as missing values.

	Inequal.	Crime	Econ.	Welfare	Marijua.	Inflation	Immigr.	Abort.	Pro-EU	Average
Austria*	0,83	0,50	0,83	0,50	0,50	0,50	0,50	0,50	0,50	0,57
Belgium	0,88	0,88	1,00	0,67	0,25	0,67	0,25	1,00	1,00	0,73
Bulgaria	0,33	0,92	0,92	0,63	0,92	0,63	0,33	1,00	0,92	0,73
Cyprus**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czech Republic*	0,25	0,88	0,25	0,67	0,67	0,88	0,25	0,67	0,67	0,57
Denmark	0,63	0,63	0,63	0,63	0,63	0,33	0,63	1,00	0,63	0,63
Estonia**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Finland	1,00	0,67	0,88	0,88	0,25	0,67	0,88	0,88	0,25	0,70
France	0,89	0,81	0,71	0,58	0,13	0,89	0,40	0,95	0,95	0,70
Germany	0,38	0,50	0,21	0,21	0,50	0,38	0,50	0,68	0,91	0,47
Greece*	1,00	0,75	0,75	1,00	0,00	0,75	0,75	1,00	0,00	0,67
Hungary*	0,75	0,75	0,75	0,75	0,00	0,00	0,75	0,75	0,75	0,58
Ireland	0,92	0,80	0,63	0,63	0,63	0,80	0,33	0,33	0,50	0,62
Italy	0,81	0,89	0,41	0,50	0,68	0,70	0,35	0,30	0,61	0,58
Latvia**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lithuania**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malta**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	0,67	0,67	0,25	0,67	0,88	0,67	0,67	0,88	0,67	0,67
Poland	0,30	0,83	0,50	0,30	0,75	0,30	0,00	0,00	0,90	0,43
Portugal*	1,00	0,83	0,50	0,83	0,50	1,00	1,00	0,83	1,00	0,83
Romania	0,71	0,89	0,40	0,58	0,81	0,40	0,71	0,89	0,95	0,71
Slovakia**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovenia**	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Spain	0,92	0,63	0,92	0,80	0,33	0,63	0,33	0,80	0,92	0,70
Sweden	0,80	0,33	0,33	0,80	0,92	0,33	0,92	1,00	0,33	0,64
UK	0,58	0,89	0,40	0,58	0,40	0,40	0,58	0,58	0,58	0,56

its members vote and to address its internal dynamics, such as cohesiveness of its political groups. A part of the literature envisages a high EPGs cohesiveness, with voting behaviour consistently falling along ideological lines, and considers national affiliation as a marginal factor in terms of influence exerted on the way MEPs vote. Consistently with the critical literature claiming that the inferences based on RCVs only may be misleading, I have developed a simple model to inductively understand how MEPs would vote, if they could follow their exogenous preferences. The analyses are based on a dataset of 2010 MEPs' survey records. In terms of external validity of this model, this study has no ambition of explaining how MEPs actually vote. Nevertheless, since voting behaviour is not observable when vote is not held under the roll-call procedure, alternative methods have to be defined. In this

respect, my main findings are that, surprisingly, national affiliation plays a greater role than the one usually attributed to it, at least in terms of individual preferences. The EP's functioning is evolving towards the classical Westminster model, however clear national elements still survive. Future research could apply this simple model to other previous surveys waves (2006, 2000, 1996⁹), to evaluate possible changes in the identified pattern. Alternatively, worth studying would be the application of more sophisticated statistical to analysis of variables I have created from the survey data, such as Poole and Rosenthal's (1997, 2005) spatial maps of legislative voting.

9 These data are already available, thanks to Simon Hix (surveys of 2010, 2006, 2000) and GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences (survey of 1996).

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